EPQ Report – A comparison using an artefact map to display and evaluate modern-day borders against historical treaties

Abstract:

I plan to create a visual representation of what the Middle East should have looked like by constructing a map with the borders redrawn according to the historical order of the promises made. Through my Extended Project, I plan to investigate the Damascus Protocol, the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. I want to know what each agreement promised, to whom each was promised, and how this would have changed the Middle East. The historical order of these events is highly important, as there is a large amount of overlap between the agreements, therefore, I will make it my priority to investigate which agreements came first. To succeed in my project, my artefact will address several issues with each agreement, as well as conclude whether the historical treaties were accurately followed.

Introduction:

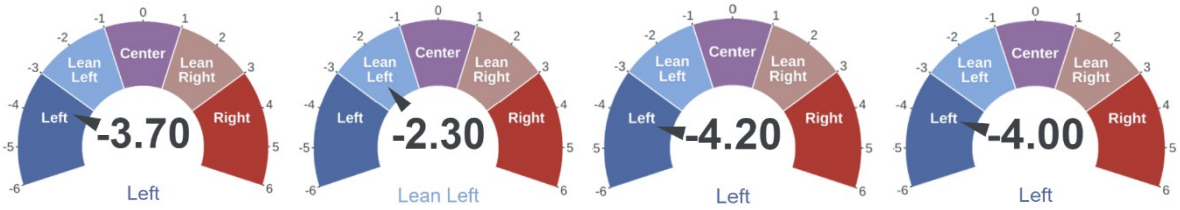
The Middle East is the most geopolitically unstable region on Earth, with an estimated 45 ongoing armed conflicts occurring. There are 2 main powers within the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Iran, which constantly engage in proxy warfare for influence and control of the Middle East. There has long been tension in the Middle East over cultural, religious and power status differences. Notably, in Israel and Palestine, there has been tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians over Jewish-Islamic religious disagreements for just under a century.

These tensions have been ever-growing since the 20th Century, following the disestablishment of the Ottoman Empire on the 1st of November 1922. However, the disestablishment of the Middle East into 17 sovereign nations is highly questionable. Following the start of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire aligned itself with the Central Powers. As a result, the Triple Entente, Great Britain, France and the Russian Empire began planning the defeat of the Central Powers, and what would happen to the Ottoman Empire following the war's end. However, the agreements to divide the Ottoman Empire were not as simplistic as they were made out to be. The reason for this was that across the 4 years of the First World War, 4 separate agreements were made by the British on how the Ottoman Empire would be divided. All 4 of these agreements overlapped with one another.

The reason I decided to complete my Extended Project on this topic is because I have always had a deep interest in geopolitics and international relations, with it being my main study choice for university. As a result, I began researching the Middle East, as it is widely renowned for being a political house of cards. This then led me to the foundation of my EPQ. I did a little reading into what makes the Middle East such a fragile region, and after stumbling across “The Balfour Declaration: The origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict” by Johnathon Schneer, I realised how much responsibility for the current state of the Middle East is owed to the United Kingdom. Specifically, a few very powerful men in the United Kingdom. Today, I seek to explore just how far the works of these men set the Middle East on course to total annihilation.

Literature Review:

There have been many articles summarising each of the 4 agreements, ranging from Britannica, the Middle East Eye (MEE), Al Jazeera, the New Yorker, the Atlantic and more. After reviewing these articles, I noticed an issue. Using GroundNews and AllSidesMedia to check the reliability of my sources, I found that almost all of them have a leftist bias, with AllSidesMedia giving the New Yorker a bias rating of -4.2. As a result, the articles were more likely to portray the agreements as failures since the sources tended to be against the colonialist ideas of early-1900s Britain. To counter this issue, I used Britannica, a highly scientific, centrist media source, to get a more unbiased perspective on what truly happened. Across my project, I used the different articles as sources to create a judgment to answer whether the agreements were appropriately followed.



Middle East | Al Jazeera | The New | The Atlantic

The Balfour Declaration: Britain's fatal mistake in Palestine – Eugene Rogan, 01/11/21[i]

Dr Eugen Lawrence Rogan is an American historian with a Fellow of the British Academy (FBA) award. He is a Professor of Middle Eastern History at St Anthony's College in Oxford. He has several publications covering the history following the Ottoman Empire's dissolution, including The Fall of the Ottomans, "Outside In: On the Margins of the Modern Middle East, and "Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire". As an author, Eugene Rogan is highly knowledgeable, as proven by his extensive works on the topic; however, when writing the article for the Middle East Eye, there are some critiques. The article summarises the purpose that Former Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur J Balfour had for the Balfour Declaration when proposing it in November 1917. Whilst the history behind the narrative of the article is highly reliable as it was written by a specialist in that field, the tone and description presented around the success of the Declaration is quite evidently biased. As a media source, the Middle East Eye are notoriously pro-Palestinian and biased against Zionist movements. Therefore, when analysing the article, we must take into consideration that the article will be written to paint the Declaration in a negative light for being supportive of Zionism.

A century on: Why Arabs resent Sykes-Picot – Al Jazeera[ii]

When attempting to analyse Al Jazeera's article on the Sykes-Picot agreement, I immediately noticed some issues. The first issue was the source's origin. Across the article, I could not find a publication date or an author's name. As a result, I was immediately sceptical since I could not verify the authenticity or credibility of the article. To mitigate this, I used MBFC, a website commended by Penn State University, to determine the credibility of other articles published by Al Jazeera. According to the rating scale given by MBFC, Al Jazeera carries a factuality score of 4.7, showing a strong mix of

factual and misinformed publications. Another issue of the article was its bias. Like the Middle East Eye, Al Jazeera is another left-leaning media source. Although Al Jazeera has a media bias rating of -2.3, which is more centrist than the Middle East Eye's -3.7 rating, it is still a distinct left-leaning bias. Combined with the naturally questionable credibility of the information provided by Al Jazeera as a general news source, I needed to interpret the article with a grain of salt.

Sykes-Picot Agreement – Adam Augustyn[iii]

Britannica, the US-based website commonly known for avoiding bias and publishing reliable facts, have a score of 0.5 according to MBFC, showing their high reporting ability. They have even been proven, by an analysis conducted by Forbes, to be less biased than Wikipedia. The creator of this article, Adam Augustyn, who gained an MA in English from the Loyola University of Chicago, has been working for Britannica since 2006 and has over 292 primary contributions to Britannica since joining as a researcher. By combining all these credentials, I assumed that Britannica is a useful source with high reliability. When reviewing the information on their website concerning the Sykes-Picot agreement, I could not find any examples of biases, allowing for all the quotes I obtained from them to be used effectively in my project.

Damascus Protocol:

On the 23rd of May 1915, the leaders of 2 Arab secret societies, Al-Fatat and Al-Ahd, created a document outlining the demands they wanted Faisal I of Iraq to give to the British during a visit to Constantinople, in trade for Arab support in the revolt against the Ottoman Empire.

The 4 demands listed included: the recognition of Arab independence over most of today's Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestinian Territories according to the ***Economic Cooperation Foundation***[iv], the abolition of the capitulation regime, the British and future Arab states forming a defensive alliance, and the British being granted economic preference.

The recognition by Great Britain of Arab independence was set out in a by 4 frontiers. According to ***the Balfour Project***[v] "to the North – the Line Mersin-Adana to parallel 37N, to the East – the Persian frontier down to the Persian Gulf, to the South – the Indian Ocean, with the exclusion of Aden, to the West – the Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea back to Mersin." Thanks to the clear-cut coordinates of the 4 frontiers, this border could be drawn with near-absolute clarity, with no room for disagreement.

Hussein-McMahon Correspondence:

Once the Damascus Protocol had been established, a series of messages was sent between Hussein Ibn Ali, King of the Hejaz, and Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt. Since Arab assistance against the Ottoman Empire was so necessary, these messages were used to try to clarify exactly what was in trade for the assistance.

However, according to ***Britannica,*** “disagreements on several points persisted unresolved”. This was found by a conflict in understanding, which ***the Jewish Virtual Library***[vi] identified. ***UDEL***[vii] referred to one message from Sir Henry stating, “Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sharif of Mecca.” This conflicted with ***JVL***, who stated, “I feel it my duty to state … that it was not intended by me in giving this pledge to King Hussein to include Palestine in the area in which Arab independence was promised. I also had every reason to believe … the fact that Palestine was not included in my pledge was well understood by King Hussein.”

Even this early on, contradictions and backtracking had already begun, and it would continue as more agreements were made. The conflicting statements from ***JVL*** and the ***UDEL*** were a testament to the loopholes the British were willing to abuse to achieve their goal without giving much in return. As a result of this backtrack, it’s difficult to justify the inclusion of the region of Palestine in the Kingdom of Arabia, something I had to take into account when developing the map.

Sykes-Picot Agreement:

There is a key common misconception about the Sykes-Picot Agreement. This misconception is that only Mark Sykes and François George-Picot worked on the division plans. A third and fourth member, Francesco Nitti, a delegate from Italy, and Sergey Dmitriyevich Sazonov, a delegate from the former Russian Empire, were also involved in the talks and were responsible for deciding what regions would be given to Italy and the Russian Empire.

However, since the Italian agreement claimed regions of Turkey, Nitti’s work was removed following the Turkish Prime Minister’s override to make Turkey an independent nation in the Treaty of Lausanne. Sazonov’s work faded away following the Soviet Revolution in 1917, and the Russian divide within the agreement was quietly removed.

This became highly important after all the agreements were complete, since when the Sykes-Picot Agreement had been completed, the Bolsheviks came across the text of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and on November 23, 556 days after the deal was signed, published it in Pravda and Izvestia. Three days after that, the Manchester Guardian also published the text, as told by ***the Atlantic***[viii]. Instead of finding out through diplomatic talks, the Arabs learned they’d been cheated through a newspaper.

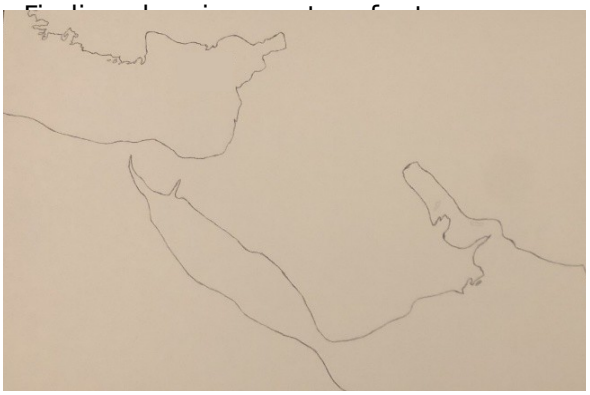
Balfour Declaration:

The final agreement was by far the hardest to clarify. The Balfour Declaration, created by Arthur James Balfour in 1917, was a 67-word document establishing Israel as a nation within the British State of Mandatory Palestine. The issue with his declaration was three-fold. Issue one: By following the terms of the Damascus Protocol and the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the British State for Mandatory Palestine would be a free Arab nation. Or would it? Issue two: The Arabs and Israelis did not get along. Their religious disagreements would later result in some of the most violent conflicts of the 20th Century. Issue three: The Balfour Declaration was painstakingly vague. The 67-word document did not clarify when the establishment of Israel would occur, what regions would be included, and what would happen to Jerusalem. All these points are highly essential to the establishment of a nation.

The Balfour Declaration faced large amounts of criticism for its role in the modern-day conflicts that stemmed from it, as well as the motives behind the declaration. As put by ***The Middle East Eye*** and ***World Future Fund***[ix] respectively: “Against the rival and incompatible nationalisms its mandate unleashed, Britain was left with no choice but to withdraw from the territory it had once hoped would be a permanent part of its empire” and “Even David Lloyd George, who was Prime Minister at the time the Balfour Declaration was issued, admitted later in 1937 that the declaration was made for ‘propagandist reasons’.”

Developing The Project:

Below are images of the previous attempt to create a map of the 4 agreements. The difficulties I faced were:
- Attempting to draw each nation to scale
- Attempting to angle slanted regions, e.g. the Red Sea
- Attempting to draw Israel and the Gaza Strip correctly
- Designing the areas with overlap
- Attempting to detail small regions and terrain, e.g. the islands around Türkiye
- Finding relevant reference images

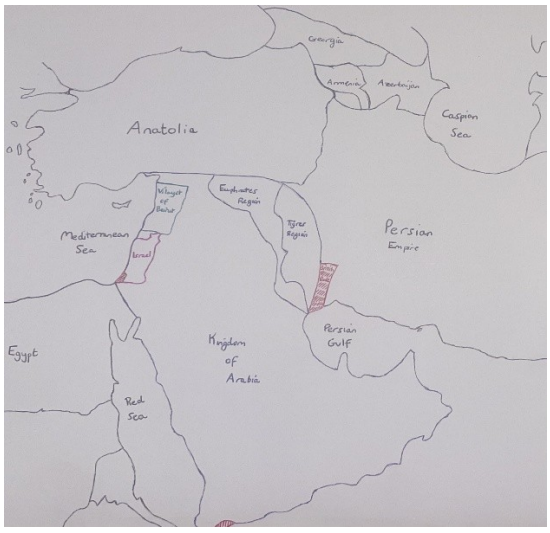


Developing The Project:

To overcome some of these difficulties, I:
- Printed a square grid onto my modern-day Middle East map to measure how large the outline of each nation was
- I practised lightly sketching the minor variations along the borders, as well as practising making smaller islands that were to scale with the terrain around it
- To solve the lack of clear reference images, I searched through several historical websites to find descriptions that could indicate the regions I needed to outline

The Finished Project:

Below is a comparison of my finished project with a map of the Middle East as it's known in the present-day
- The area in blue represents the region given to the Kingdom of Arabia under the Damascus Protocol
- The area in green represents the region that would become an independent Arab state
- The areas highlighted in red are areas that would be British-ruled under the Sykes-Picot Agreement
- The area in pink represents the region given to Israel under the Balfour Declaration



The Conclusion:

At the beginning of my project, my goal was to create a comparison using an artefact map to display and evaluate modern-day borders against historical treaties. This involved a series of objectives, such as researching each treaty to find out who it was designed for and what it was promising. I was able to complete this objective by using Google Scholar to isolate relevant sources which I could evaluate, analyse and quote from. Although I faced difficulties with a heavy leftist bias in my sources, cross-referencing with MBFC and Britannica allowed me to combat the issue to guarantee the highest level of accuracy possible.

My next objective, following the isolation of necessary sources, was to begin the development of my draft. To produce a realistic representation of what the borders would have been, I had to develop my cartographical skills through a series of practice drafts, which would allow me to find individual issues between each draft. After several drafts, I was able to advance with my project, as I had created a map which was of sufficient quality to begin a comparison to answer my question. Using a range of colours, I then highlighted each region according to the agreement which it was relevant. It was at this point that I faced the difficulty of the overlap.

These four major agreements illustrate just how contradictory the promises made during the Great War were. If we examine the borders these agreements promised and compare them with the ones we have today, it's painfully clear that the agreements were not upheld. There seems to be almost no part of any agreement that seems fulfilled properly.

If we take an example such as Israel, the very fact that it would not exist had the Damascus Protocol and the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence been fulfilled is a testament to the metaphorical labyrinth that these agreements embodied. The imperial powers took advantage of a crumbling empire and numerous weak tribes to benefit themselves in whatever way they saw fit. As a result, I decided that the borders of the Middle East as they're known today are not accurate representations of the promises made in the 4 major agreements between 1915 and 1917.

[i]References:

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